

PRAYER 201
Why Believe?

INTRO: Last Sunday I spoke to you on what I called, "Prayer 201: Why Believe?" Prayer 101 was, "Why Pray?" Last Sunday we looked at this question from God's perspective. This Sunday we want to look at it from man's perspective. Why has God chosen that man must believe to have his prayers answered? From God's perspective I recommended to you that God requires faith before He responds to our praying because in that way He gets the glory. If God did not require faith, we would soon be puffed up out of proportion. Second, I believe that if God did not require faith, His righteousness would be at stake. If He answered our prayers apart from faith, we would be ruined and He would be unrighteous. The third reason I gave was that faith requires that we learn and know His will in many things before we can pray right. So the Scripture says that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

But this morning we want to look at this question from man's perspective. What value does God's requirement of faith have from man's perspective? Of what values is it to us?

II. VIEWED FROM MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

A. To Keep us Humble

I want to give as a first and major point why God requires us to pray and pray believingly from man's perspective is to keep us humble. The Lord said in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people which are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray..." Prayer itself takes a certain amount of humility. To have to ask in itself requires some humbling. But by having to believe when we pray, I think, causes yet a deeper humbling. So the Lord says, "If My people which are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face..." To pray in faith you have to seek His face. And it is His face that shows us whether He approves or not. So you have to seek His face to see what His will is. So Jesus said in chapter 11, "Have faith in God." And believing requires yet further humbling because if we truly find His face and find ourselves coming short of His glory, now we have to

humble ourselves to the very lowest degree and repent. So He says if His people will humble themselves and pray and seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways. There is repentance which comes from believing what we have learned from seeing His face.

In 1 Peter 5:5 Peter says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Peter concludes like this with regard to that fact, "Humble yourselves *therefore* under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time..." Now just how do you do that? How do you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God? Well, some Bible versions make a very serious error in translating this divine text. They make two sentences out of verses 6 and 7, and that successfully buries a very marvelous truth, and that truth is how to humble oneself under God's mighty hand. Here is how: "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." And how do you cast your care on Him? By prayer, of course! And then comes the trusting or believing part. This takes humility! I have cast my care on Him, and now I must trust Him. This is living under God's mighty hand, and I remind us that we are to be 'under' His mighty hand. This is humility. Praying in faith keeps God in His rightful place, exalted far above all, and puts me in my rightful place, under His mighty hand.

As I see it, both prayer, asking; and faith, believing, require humility. The greater the faith, the greater the humility. I will tell you when we do not pray. When we do not see our need of Him and His grace. And I can tell you when we do pray. It is when some tragedy strikes or our health fails, or such like. When 9/11 happened, America prayed. They forgot Him shortly thereafter. You see, when these things happen, all of a sudden we realize how powerless, how impotent, how hopeless our best efforts are and we are left with but one thing, and that is seek some divine help.

The great tragedy is that, for the most part, when things are going well, we do not see our need of God. I want to tell you a little of my own life. There is hardly a day goes by that I do not groan and say, "Oh Lord God, how I need You." And many days I come to

that place more than once. And I have told myself that in those times I should rather say, "Oh, Lord, I know You are with me." But the very next thing I cry out to God, "Oh Lord God, I need You. If you do not go with me in this, I am finished. Oh Lord God, I need you."

B. To Keep Us From **Boasting**

A second reason I want to give why God requires faith in us in order to receive things in prayer is closely related to the first point and that is that it keeps us from boasting. Boasting is the opposite of humility. Again the reason why God requires us to believe before He gives us those things we desire is the same reason why we must believe to be saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 says we are saved by grace through faith and this salvation is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. If salvation were of works, we would boast. But now God has set it up in such a way that it is by grace through faith, and that takes all the boasting out of it.

You see, the two things required for salvation are repentance and faith. These are both man's responsibility. Neither action is meritorious. For example, let us say you gave me a gift and I offered you one dollar and you took it, it would have ceased to be a gift. But if you offered me a gift and I took it without giving you anything for it, simply taking the gift is not a meritorious act and so it remains a gift. So it is with repentance and faith. We must do them, but they do not merit anything.

Hebrews 11:26 says that without faith it is not possible to please God. Why? What is so important about believing? Why is faith necessary to receiving answers to prayer? I propose that the answer is the same as why faith is necessary to salvation. Why do we need to believe to be saved? Romans 3:21-26 tells us why (read). Verses 21-22 say that the righteousness that comes apart from the law, or apart from works, is the righteousness that is imputed through faith. Verse 23 then goes on to say that we have all sinned and come short of God's glory. It is God's glory that is at stake, the ultimate purpose

why He created everything. So God set Christ to be a satisfaction for our sins, so that righteousness would be achieved by faith in Him. And He did it this way so that it would not be by works, for if it had been of works, we would boast. Works is cause for boasting. Faith takes all boasting away. So Romans 3:27 says, "Where is boasting then?" It goes on to say, "It is excluded." When it is by faith, boasting is out. Works is for man's glory. Faith, for God's glory. And God did this to demonstrate His righteousness. In all of this, God's glory and His righteousness are at stake. Verse 26 says it is to demonstrate His righteousness, and that He might be just and justifier of the one who has faith in Him. So, when we are saved by faith, all boasting is excluded. I propose that when God makes things available to us by faith, all boasting is excluded.

When we pray and believe God for the things we have prayed for, the believing we do has no merit and takes away all right for boasting. Praying, asking and believing do not earn anything. They qualify us for something. A while ago Tompkins Mobile had a customer appreciation day. Well, they gave away hot lunches and a lot of other things and they had various draws you could enter. Well, Mac Tools was there as well, and my wife and I had a free lunch and we entered our names for various prizes. And shortly thereafter I was notified that I had won a very nice 18 volt cordless drill. They did not say, "Congratulations, you have earned a fine drill." No, there is a big difference between earning and winning. You see, entering a draw does not earn one anything, it simply qualifies one to win! Just so, praying and believing does not earn anything. It qualifies us to receive. That takes all rightful boasting out of it.

C. To Prepare Us To Receive

I want to give another reason why we must believe in order to receive things in prayer. As I see it, prayer and believing prepare us to receive. When I spoke on 'Why Pray?' I said that one of the reasons was to prepare us to receive. I think I need not tell you how prone to pride we all are. I think we are often not ready to receive. We say, "I am ready to

receive right now!" We may be praying for rain. And if we got rain every time we thought we needed it, and did not get rain every time we did not need it, we would soon find ourselves in various kinds of trouble. And so, sometimes you and I might be set up for ruin if we received right now. No, God has to prepare us to receive. And many times when we have come to the utter end of ourselves, and have faith alone, we have been prepared to receive. But by then some godly changes will have taken place in our hearts.

Many years ago Prairie Bible Institute was sued. I think they were sued for something like \$9000.00. In those days and at their income at that time, that was an amount they could not pay. And I believe it was one of the board members that said, "Thank God it is so much. If it was less we might be able to figure out how to do it ourselves. Now we will have to trust God."

This last year at one point I was to my very end in a situation that required much wisdom. I said, "Lord, I need a little miracle by tomorrow." The next day, though I had no little miracle I set out to help in a situation, and before I arrived, the Lord had given me a little miracle.

Let me tell you what happens in many Christian psychology classes. The student is taught how to go about counseling. Here is step one, then two, then three and you counsel for years and there you are. I am told that just as many people are helped by not going to see professional counselors as are helped by going. Why? Well, many times some situations just take time. But what I fear students in Christian counseling are often not taught, or taught with enough emphasis, is how to pray and trust God.

When I think back to my education, an education for which I am very grateful, still I see an area I now feel was greatly lacking. When I look back at my own teaching of others, I see that same lack. A lack of emphasis on prayer. When I went to Bible school, there was one elective course on prayer. An elective course is a course that is not required. There was no required course on prayer.

My wife said a while ago as we drove home from doing battle at prayer meeting, "I think I am just now learning to pray." I feel that way too. I spend hours each week in prayer and go to prayer meeting regularly and feel myself a beginner. Oh God, send us the spirit of prayer! Lord, teach us to pray!

So let me give a word to those who will be studying to prepare for ministry, a word from my own failure. It is this: Pray! Let me qualify that from Acts 6, where the first deacons were chosen. Deacons were chosen to take care of the temporal matters of the church so that pastors could give themselves to the eternal things. Here is what the apostles said to the early church, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may set over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Now notice carefully the order here. It is not, the ministry of the Word and prayer. It is prayer and the ministry of the Word. Soon I will have been a Christian for 40 years. I am just learning that it is prayer then ministry, not ministry then prayer. Soon I will have been in the ministry 24 years. Just now I am learning that it is prayer first. I give this word to those who will yet be called to the ministry.

Then there is a word for everybody and it is this: Prayer ought to be primary, not secondary; prayer is first, not second. Are you a mom or a dad? Prayer ought to be a priority. Are you looking for a life partner? Prayer ought to be a priority. Are you a business man? Prayer ought to be a priority. Are you living with your parents? Prayer ought to be a priority. It matters not what your position, gender, or occupation; prayer ought to be a priority.

Jesus gave a parable to this end: Men ought always to pray and not to faint. It is disobedience to God not to pray. It is a sin not to pray. And I believe we are not prepared to receive until we have prayed and believed, and sometimes we must pray long before we are ready to receive.

D. To Keep Us From Sin

There is yet one more reason why I believe the Lord requires us to believe in order to receive things in prayer. It is this. It is not possible to live by faith and pray in faith, and live in sin. And if I live in sin and pray, the Lord will not hear me. The Bible says so. There are two major things that sin affects immediately; Bible reading and prayer. Let me give you a thermometer to check your spiritual status this morning. How is your Bible reading, and how is your prayer life? You see, when these are out, faith is out. When my choices in life need to be in line with God's will before I can pray in faith, sin is out. How can my will be in line with God when I live in sin? And when we love God and we experience answers in prayer, and then find what sin does to us, we will want to keep sin out. Sin is devastating to the spiritual life and especially prayer.

Let me give you a brief illustration (Tel. wire).

E. To Purify our Motivations

There is yet another reason I believe God requires of us to believe in prayer. Turn with me to James 4 (read 1-3). In verses 1-2 the writer says they do not have because they do not ask. Then in verse 3 he says they ask but don't receive. The first error was not asking. How many times might we not fail to ask? But then when they did ask, they did not receive, and why not? They asked amiss. They asked with only their own interests in mind. Certainly this is not a prayer of faith. If they had prayed in faith, their own desires would have had to be put in the background and God's will would have needed to have been ascertained. How can we pray in faith when our own will over-rides the will of God? How can we pray in faith when our own desires are higher than God's?

Now I want you to notice what people are called who don't pray or they pray for their own pleasures. They are called adulterers and adulteresses! Why? They belong to God and are playing with a false god. They have loved the world, above God and thus they are untrue to their relationship to the Lord. Could not here be part of the enigma of unanswered prayer? What

motivates me to pray? My own welfare; or God's will? But praying in faith will weed out such false motivations because I cannot pray in faith without knowing God intimately.

F. To Change Us

I want to give as a last reason why faith is necessary in prayer because faith is the greatest change agent in the economy of God in conforming men and women to the image of Christ. As I see it, God has two great change agents. These are repentance and faith. Today's Gospel is many times given as believing in Christ. That is the sum total, believe in Christ. But that is a fatal Gospel, if something fatal can be called a Gospel. Repentance turns me from sin. That is a great change. But faith turns me to God, and it is this that makes me become like Christ. When we turn and look in the mirror of God's Word and will, we become like Him.

You see, in Hebrews 6 we have this incredible verse on faith. Turn to it in chapter 11 (read verse 6). Then you can go through this chapter and find how many verses start like this, "By faith..." And then you will read of what is accomplished by faith. Now I want to ask you, why does faith please God? And from that question I want to give you another proposal why God requires us to believe to receive things by prayer. Here is my answer: God requires us to believe because believing Him or trusting in Him changes us and strengthens us to do what He wants us to do.

Let me give you an example, once more from salvation itself. Here is a vile sinner. Nobody thinks he will ever get saved. And then he does. What happens? He changes! True salvation will always do that. No change, no salvation. You see, there are, as I see it, two great change agents in God's requirements of man; and these are repentance and faith. Why repentance? It changes us! Repentance is a change of mind, metanoia! It turns us from sin. Faith changes us because we change how we believe. When we change how we believe, that will change our behavior. We change from man's way of thinking to God's way of thinking. That is change! That is what pleases God. That is why, without faith it is impossible to please

God. So not only does believing prayer change us, it pleases God Almighty! God's greatest work in the believer is the believer's sanctification and the believer's sanctification takes place by faith. This pleases God. When the believer gets saved by faith, he changes. When he lives by faith he is continually changing. And when he prays in faith, God works change in Him.

I have just read the story the church library has of Sadhu Sundar Singh, an Indian missionary in India in the early 1900's. He was walking towards Tibet with some merchants when they were robbed by some bandits. They were then taken to a cave and Sundar feared the worst. Then he sensed he should preach to these bandits and did so. The bandit leader then led him into the cave and showed him piles of bones of human remains. And he told Sundar he had killed all these people. And then he asked if this God Sundar was talking about could forgive him. The man then got saved, restored all their possessions, and they were on their way again. Faith changes people.

In the book we read through at prayer meeting, "Mighty Prevailing Prayer" by Wesley L. Duesel there is a story of a Christian lady and her unbelieving husband. The story is told by Charles Blanchard, who was the president of Wheaton College for 43 years. He heard this story in person and later verified it. A very sinful man, an engineer on the Pennsylvania Lines had a faithful praying wife. Then he got very sick and lost weight until he was less than 100 pounds. The doctors finally came and gave the wife the news that her husband was dead. She said, "No, he's not dead. He cannot be dead. I have prayed for him for 27 years and God has promised me that he would be saved. Do you think God would let him die now after I have prayed twenty seven years and God has promised, and he is not saved?" Well, the doctor said he didn't know anything about that, but he did know he was dead. Then the screen was drawn around the cot that separated the living from the dead.

But the wife could not believe her husband was dead. Other physicians were brought in, one after another, until seven were around the cot. Each one confirmed he was dead. But the wife insisted he was not dead

and if he was, God would restore him to life so he could get saved. She prayed until her knees gave out and then she asked for a pillow to kneel on. She prayed and the hours ticked by. Four hours, then five, then seven and then thirteen hours she prayed while the people wished she would go away. And she said, "No, he has to be saved. God will bring him back if he is dead. He is not dead. He cannot die until he is saved."

And then, after thirteen hours of prayer, the engineer opened his eyes and the wife said, "What do you wish my dear?" And he said, "I wish to go home." So she told the doctors he wished to go home and they were simply horrified. They said, "Why, it will kill him. It will be suicide." And she said to them, "You have had your turn. You said he was dead already. I am going to take him home." And here was the testimony of this man, "I weigh now 246 pounds. I still run a fast train on the Pennsylvania Lines. I have been out to Minneapolis on a little vacation, telling men what Jesus can do, and I am glad to tell you what Jesus can do" (pages 161-162).

Now that story is so very incredible I would not dare repeat it if it was not told by very sane and honorable Christians. We find it hard to believe that God can move mountains, but He can. But I want to make a point from that story. It is this: Why did this woman have such faith? I will tell you why. Though she had an ungodly husband, she lived faithfully with God. Second, for 27 years she prayed for her husband's salvation. That is faithful! And in that time she gained an assurance from God that her husband would be saved. And when all natural phenomena went against her, and she needed to move a mountain, she believed God. This did not happen in the first year of praying. It happened after 27 years. She had learned to hear the Lord and she had been faithful to Him, and she prayed and she believed. And through her changed life which happened by faith, her husband was changed by her faith and then his own faith.

How about starting now to learn to live by faith and pray. And how about living it faithfully for 5 years, or 10 years or 20 years or 27 years, if God gives you

that amount of time. And then, maybe somewhere down the line you will need a miracle, and you will have learned to trust God for things, and you will remove a mountain.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, why does God require faith when we pray from man's perspective? I have given a number of reasons. First, to keep us from man's primary sin, pride. To pray, or ask, requires a degree of humility. To pray and believe, requires even greater humility. Second, and closely related, I believe God requires of us to pray and believe to keep us from boasting. Works leads to boasting, faith takes all boasting out of anything. Then I believe that requiring us to believe keeps us from sin. It is not possible to live in sin and receive things from God by faith. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. So says the Word of God.

Then, I believe God requires us to pray in faith in order to purify our motivations. James says in 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." We need to check and see how much of our praying is selfish, and how much is for God's glory. God said if we lacked wisdom we should ask. But then he says, "But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord: he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6).

And last, I recommended that God requires faith in prayer because faith is one of the two greatest change agents in the lives of sinful people. The other is repentance. Repentance is the negative; faith is the positive. Repentance turns us from sin. Faith turns us to God. One who exercises faith is a doer of the Word. James says that a hearer of the Word who is not a doer is like a person who looks in the mirror and observes his natural face, and as soon as he is no longer looking in the mirror, he forgets what he looks like. But he that looks into the Word of God and continues to look into it, this one is blessed in what he does. His faith is rewarded. So Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

